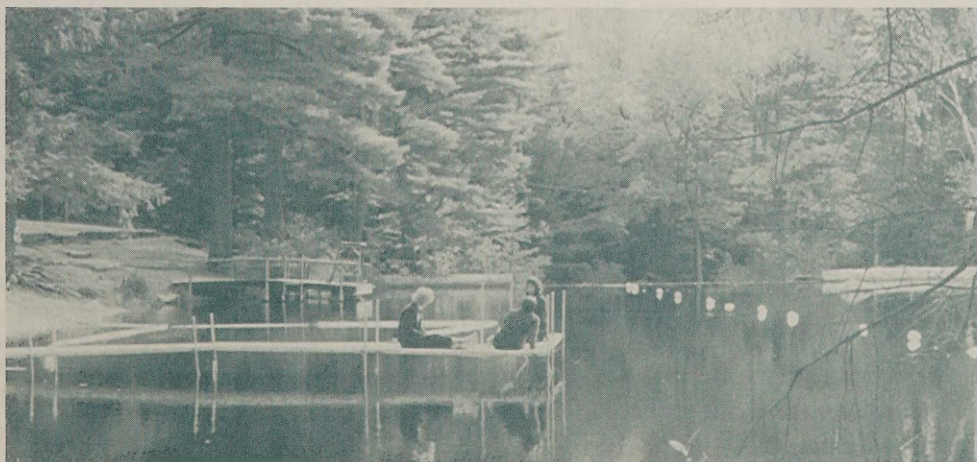
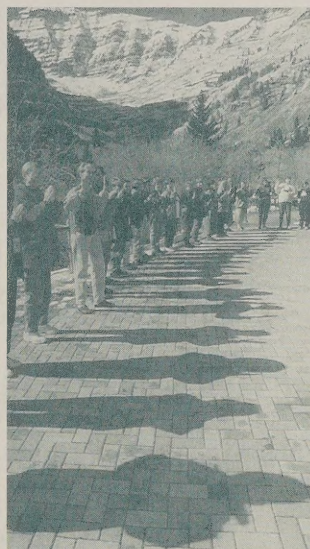


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Exponent II

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Submissions to *Exponent II*

Contribute to *Exponent II*. We welcome personal essays, articles, poetry, fiction, and book reviews for consideration. We focus on—but do not print exclusively—manuscripts that are women- and Mormon-related. Please e-mail submissions to ExponentII@aol.com or mail them on IBM-compatible or Mac disks to *Exponent II*, Box 128, Arlington, MA 02476. If sending hard copy, double-space your manuscript and write on one side only with your name, address, phone number, and, when available, your e-mail address on each page. Keep a copy of your work; manuscripts will not be returned.

We are always looking for artwork and photography to use for covers and illustrations in *Exponent II*. Send slides or copies of your work for consideration. If you are interested in illustrating articles, please contact us for specific assignments.

The purpose of *Exponent II* is to promote sisterhood by providing a forum for Mormon women to share their life experiences in an atmosphere of trust and acceptance. Our common bond is our connection to the Mormon Church and our commitment to women in the Church. The courage and spirit of women challenge and inspire us to examine and shape the direction of our lives. We are confident that this open forum will result in positive change. We publish this paper in celebration of the strength and diversity of women.

Exponent II

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Cover Design by
Connie Chow

Picture this: I sit at a wooden picnic table under a New Hampshire sky that would make Georgia O'Keeffe gape. My plate is loaded with amazing fare. Everything that can be homemade is: the hamburger buns, the mayonnaise, the ice cream sandwiches. I am surrounded by beautiful women whose sole job is to tell and listen to stories. Across from me is my mother's college roommate and rival for homecoming queen. She is sharing an epiphany she had recently at the temple. To my left, two friends discuss birth order and why, as oldests, they feel compelled to overachieve. Behind me on a blanket, my baby girl coos at the leafy trees above her.

As I sit, I feel myself returning. That part of me that I push aside while I work/cook/mother/serve. That part of



me that hungers for uninterrupted conversations with women who see past my various labels. The part of me that is brave enough to sing a silly Mormon version of "The Brady Bunch" at the talent show. I embrace these estranged aspects of myself and begin to feel whole. Ideally, women's retreats are reunions, of friends and of self, a time for renewal and reconnection.

On the pages that follow, we present the histories and stories of four such retreats. Like the women who attend them, they are unique. But whether you find your way to the Provo Canyon, Rocky Mountain, Midwest, or Exponent II (Hillsboro) retreat, you will find the women have come to listen, share, laugh, renew. Join us.

Heather Sundahl

Retreat Snapshots

by Linda Hoffman Kimball

me . . ." These are some of the tranquil mental snapshots I have of nearly two generations of retreats.

I have plenty of goofy mental snapshots, too. The Denver women, for example, really know their crafts—from tampon angels to glass grapes! At a Nauvoo retreat, Nancy Harward brought the house down with, among other musical parodies, her twisted version of "I'm jest a girl who cain't say no!" about a woman getting a ward calling. At the Exponent retreat at Hillsboro, no words can describe the talent shows: the belly dancing, the conga lines, the ever-popular camp songs—"Princess Pat" and "Caravan," the "Brady Bunch" song rendered Mormon-style, and that eternal, cosmic girl-band "The Heavenly Bodies."



At Hillsboro, it's the bridge over the stream and the sun on the lake. In Ohio, it's my sister at the pulpit in the Kirtland Temple, twilight resting like a mantle on her shoulders. In Denver, it's our voices joined in a Navajo chant, filling a sunlit room to its mile-high rafters. In the Rockford retreat center, it's huddling around sheet music singing, "In this very room there's quite enough love for one like



There are some snapshots that are painful to recall. Sisters confiding that, despite the introductory words about a place of safety, they don't feel safe. Some feel too distant from the Mormonness or uncomfortable admitting their orthodoxy. There lingers for me, also, a real grief at the loss of long-time Hillsboro retreat attendee, Melanie Moss, who died too young in 1998.

continued on p. 19

Hillsboro Retreat—Home Again

by Nancy T. Dredge

Coming back to the Hillsboro retreat feels as close as I have ever come to returning to my premortal home. Walking up the hill to the dining hall, hearing the brook snapping and popping, and looking for old friends is my favorite part. Because I know what's coming: I know I'll be spiritually and intellectually fed within a circle of safety, trust, and concern. The air smells of pine, the lake glistens in the late afternoon sun, and I can hear the murmuring voices inside the dining hall. I can't wait! I'm up the stairs, through the creaking screen door, and the weekend begins. I'm home at last.
E. Victoria Grover

This vignette gives you just a hint of the flavor of the Exponent retreat held in Hillsboro, New Hampshire, something that is hard to evoke (as Carrel says in her article on page 6) on flat, one-dimensional paper. The Hillsboro camp itself is at the heart of the intense feelings women have about the Exponent retreat. Sue Booth-Forbes tells about her “discovery” of Hillsboro in 1983:

“I loved Hillsboro camp from the moment I stepped out of the car. It reminded me of the camp that I imagined Nancy Drew would have gone to in the summers to solve mysteries—a place I had read about all during my growing up years and never dreamed I’d get to see. Toxie [one of the two camp owners who died a few years ago of cancer] showed me around the place. She was most proud of her duty of keeping the outhouses in fine smelling order. Puffy—the



producer of such treats as blueberry buckle, bubble and squeak, and the best mashed potatoes in the world—showed me all the potential menus. Although the camp had been a girls camp for decades, Puffy and Toxie (their own girls camp nicknames) had just begun operating that summer as a family camp. Both Toxie and Puffy won me over with their Yankee practicality and pride in their place and their obvious love of the camp and their family. I felt like I’d been adopted before I left that day.”

And into this sensory Eden—the scent of pine needles mingled with those of cinnamon, rhubarb pie, or chicken; the indescribable view of the startlingly blue sky and tall pines reflected in the tannen-laden Peace Lake; the sounds of bullfrogs and cow bells and the rush of the waterfall and the lodge screen door banging and canoes being plunked into the lake—into all this come women ready to talk about their burdens and their joys.

The very first retreat was one of the most memorable. It was the tenth anniversary of the newspaper (which is why the first retreat

tee shirts bear the legend “Ex II is X”), and we wanted to celebrate by inviting women to enjoy New England in October. What we hadn’t counted on was the unpredictability of New England weather; a cold snap sent the temperature plummeting into the 20’s at night. One hundred women showed up—our largest crowd ever—and shivered around the hearths. Lela Coons, camper extraordinaire, gave seminars on how to keep warm at night in the open air, unheated cabins. Women wrapped themselves in plastic trash bags to accomplish that feat. No swimming took place that year, but the canoes and paddleboats were constantly in the lake and up the beaver-dammed creek. We were stretching, getting used to the feel of the camp—the outdoor privies, the occasional mouse running across the lodge rafters, the meals for which everything was home-made, including the pickles and maple syrup (the camp has its own sugar bush for sugaring off).

Our first keynote speakers, then in their eighties, were Esther Peterson—talking about her work as Assistant Secretary of Labor in

continued on p. 7



Hillsboro Feast

by Judy Dushku



I remember walking into a Relief Society room one morning to find some creative soul had rearranged the chairs into a wide, welcoming circle. However, several of us unconsciously set about returning the seats to their familiar formation. When we were chastised, we repented and helped the surprised sister do her thing. But it taught me that while I regard myself as such a free spirit, I have my own expectations for the way things are "supposed to be." At church, things happen in such patterned, reliable ways. I may complain and dream of variety, but I am probably as comforted as the next person by certain things not changing.

But at Exponent retreats, I have different expectations. We are invited on the first evening by Carrel Sheldon to reflect on our expectations for the weekend and to articulate them as "intentions." "Then, go ahead," she says, "and make it happen over the next three days." It works. Every year some brave and eager women say what they hope and want to happen. "I want to meet other women who have been or are married to gay

men and discuss how you have lived and dealt with this." Who would have known that many Mormon women have this situation as part of their life experience? But several at that retreat did, and they gained tremendously by sharing stories and strategies.

"I am glad to be here, but I don't like workshops. I plan to float on the lake all weekend, knowing you are near." Whatever floats your boat! Some years people want to sing; some years to line dance with the master line dancer, Sylvia. Some years people have died, and we have mourned together. We have shared stories of mastectomies, radiation therapy, infertility testing, and third marriages. Some come wanting help coping with being alone. Others seek help with living in a house with many children or in-laws or elderly parents. We have had women dance or sing their testimonies in the sun in the center of the Quaker Meeting circle. And so it goes.

All of these are ways in which *Exponent II* retreats are different from Relief Society meetings. At these blessed gatherings, we encourage one another to examine and express each heartfelt need or



desire, knowing that women will not be judged bad or nuts or wrong for asking. I just love it.

We of the *Exponent II* staff intentionally do not "manage" these retreats too heavy-handedly. They blossom and emerge quite wonderfully organically.

Each year I watch for the gang from Ithaca to pull in after hours of driving. Always, I hope the car from New Jersey will bring my buddies from "the South." And then we get a few Salt Lakers each year and a handful of Californians, and, of course, our trusty Louisianan, who tells it like it is from her vantage point of view in the swamps. I do "expect" and hope for these participants. But every year there is somebody new.

I am an Exponent retreat junkie. As Aileen Clyde commented in our first-night introductions after the usual spectacular Hillsboro meal, "The food was wonderful, but you women and your stories are the feast." These meetings in the woods in New Hampshire are truly feasts for me. And they lead me to the Lord, again and again. ❀

Retreat Friday Nights

by Carrel Hilton Sheldon

I am a true believer in open, honest sharing as a way to greater self-awareness, intimacy, connection, and insight. So I love having the marvelous opportunity every year at the Exponent retreat to run the opening ceremony of introductions on Friday night. The connection that we experience rarely happens in a group—but it always happens on Retreat Friday Night.

I can't give you an experience of our Retreat Friday Night—you have to be there. An energy exists in the room that doesn't translate to a flat, printed page. Seventy women gather round a fire and each share something significant and real that happened to her in the past year—not just "reporting" on it, but letting us know what it meant to her, how it changed her, how she felt (and now feels) about it, how she has or hasn't resolved it. The range of shared experience includes joy, depression, confusion, insight, suffering, gratitude, spiritual highs and lows. Loved ones have died or left, dreams have been realized, children have gone astray, testimonies have been strengthened or perhaps lost.

The sharing unfolds differently each year. Sometimes one idea is repeated more than others, and a theme unfolds. After the retreat, we sometimes say, "This was a sweet year" or "There sure is a lot of suffering this year" or "The frustration level is high."

The greatest contribution to the



evening comes from the individual efforts of every woman in the room. It takes courage to stand before strangers and reveal things they may not have spoken about before. It takes commitment to push through people's automatic judgments of others, their non-acceptance, their opinions of what they should or shouldn't say or do. It's so easy for individuals to think they have the answers for others. One person's self-expression can inspire, delight, enlighten, or offend different listeners at the same time.

What I provide the group before we start sharing on Friday night is a common understanding of some principles and practice that fosters acceptance, trust, and individual responsibility, which alters our experience that night and over the course of the weekend. In general, we're more aware of ourselves and others—we're a little deeper, a little truer, more understanding, more self-expressive.

I begin by asking that each woman look at her own expectations of the weekend: first, the unmet—and unmeetable—kind, where you feel disappointed. Some women come wanting to see someone who isn't there—or even come hoping that someone who is here wouldn't be here! Or maybe some people expected warmer weather—or flush toilets. Once we bring these unmeetable expectations to awareness, we can let them go. Women also come with hopes for social and spiritual enrichment, communion with nature, and good conversation. People believe that someone or something may take care of those kinds of expectations for them. Sometimes that happens, often not. To deal with these kinds of expectations, I ask retreat participants to examine what they'd like to get from the retreat to see which of those things we are willing and able to be responsible for. In choosing to be responsible for making something happen, they can transform those hopeful expectations into intentions.

The second thing I have us examine is the possibility of Trust as a Gift. In a setting like a retreat, trust isn't something each of us has a chance of earning. However, trust can be a gift we individually give to the group. We overcome our fears, concerns, excuses, and "push through" to being willing to trust. We do it by choice. Trust allows us to be more open and expressive of who we really are. Trusting the group is both a gift to the group

and a gift to the self. I ask that each participant give that gift to whatever level she is able. The other side of the gift of trust is being a worthy recipient of that trust. That means being responsible with what we hear. It means listening with the desire to understand another's experience or point of view and not letting our judgments get in the way.

The third thing I talk about is acceptance—each woman's accep-

tance of herself and others. No one has to prove herself at an Exponent retreat. There is no competition. No one has to impress us. Each person is fine just the way she is. Failure to accept another, for whatever reason—too fat, too thin, too happy, too angry, the wrong marital status, too old, too young, too many children, not enough, too liberal, too conservative—we all have plenty of reasons—cuts off the ability to really hear that person. A person's ability to speak and her

ability to listen are transformed by acceptance.

With these three principles, a couple of simple ground rules, and a specific question to address, I take the first turn to share, and we proceed around the room--woman after woman, sharing a bit of herself. And there we are, having another great Retreat Friday Night. ❀

Home Again cont. from p. 4

Kennedy's administration and consumer affairs advisor to Johnson and Carter—and her cousin Virginia Sorensen, one of the true Mormon women of letters, describing her books and Utah in the early nineteenth century.

Other retreats have been equally as memorable. Over seventeen years, the workshops have covered such topics as "Toward a New Millennium for Women: Power, Self-Awareness, and Inclusion"; "Goosing the Goddess Within: Exercises that Nurture Our Native Creativity"; "Changing Course at 50"; "Mothers and Daughters: How Did Our Garden Grow"; "Making Life Decisions You Can Live With"; "Dealing with Disappointment: Mope or Cope"; "Paradoxes of Intimacy and Interdependence"; "Breaking Down Barriers Between Women"; "Dealing with Divorce"; "Aikido: A Form of Personal Empowerment"; "Making Peace with Your Body"; "Shiatsu: Acupressure Massage"; "Spiritual Empowerment"; "Infertility"; "Dealing with

Cancer"; "Interpreting and Using Our Dreams"; "The Perfect Relief Society: What Do We Want?"; "Is There History in Your Dishcloth?"; "Am I Crazy? Understanding Menopause"; "Dealing with Depression"; "Empowering Young Women"; "Recovering Women's Stories in Scripture"; "The Sister Missionary Experience."

In addition to eight or nine workshops each retreat, we have had outstanding keynote speakers and wonderful presentations: Eloise Bell's recreation of Patty Sessions; the performances of excerpts from Susan Howe's play *Katie*; Emma Lou Thayne and Linda Sillitoe reading their poetry; songs sung to us by Lou Chandler, Marion Bishop, Alison Pingree, Heather Sundahl, Kristine Martin, Tiffany Smith-Driggs; Eileen Lambert's

slide show on Mormon artist Minerva Teichert; dream diaries read by Mary Bradford; Louise Plummer's reading excerpts from her teen books that had us rolling in the aisles; Claudia Bushman's speaking about "Mormon Feminism in the 19th Century"; dances by Maida Withers, Jenny Atkinson, Lorraine Bradford Gravallese, Sylvia Russell; plus other wonderful talents (or anti-talents) shared at our talent shows.

The Quaker meeting always ends our retreats, giving women the chance to reflect on insights gained, commitment strengthened, and testimonies renewed. This meeting is our nod to the first Pilgrimage held in Nauvoo in 1982, which made us want to expand our own small retreats of about twenty Exponent staffers and our annual Exponent Day dinners to include more women.

The Exponent retreats are an extraordinary blend of inner and outer beauty, an exchange of ideas and an equal exchange with nature. May the retreat continue for another seventeen years—and beyond! ❀



Personal Revelation in an Authoritarian

by Victoria Grover



Summary of a workshop held at the Summer 2000 Exponent Retreat.

Sooner or later, almost every Latter-day Saint experiences conflict within the framework of his or her religious community. That conflict is particularly challenging when it seems to involve differing interpretations of the will of the Lord. In a religious environment that places great value on both personal revelation and obedience to authority, what are we to do when these two principles clash?

The Church has clear structural and ideological answers to these conflicts when they occur: Either the hierarchy of authority or the principle of stewardship tells us which interpretation will prevail.

But what do we do as individuals when we feel the promptings of the spirit get overruled? When we seem to find ourselves ill-used by someone else's decision or perhaps even believe that we are victims of injustice within the Church? Whether it's a matter of how Church welfare resources will be

distributed or where new ward boundaries will be drawn, hundreds of decisions are made by those in authority with which we may deeply disagree. How do we deal with this when it happens? What is there for us to learn from these experiences, and where are the dangers? Finally, what is unique about the Mormon view of the dispersement of spiritual power and how can the implicit tension it creates enlighten us as individuals and as a larger community of wards and stakes in Zion?

These are the questions I asked during a recent retreat workshop, and I felt richly rewarded by the responses women shared within the group. I believe we were led to a consensus of faith in the power of the gospel to bind together diverse and unique individuals into a community striving to be at one with the Savior. What follows is my interpretation of the ideas expressed in that workshop.

About ten years ago, I had an interaction with a new bishop that changed the course of my spiritual life forever. In that short meeting, it became rapidly clear that he and I had very different views on fundamental principles of commitment and obligation. Over the next week, I struggled with a flood of feelings surrounding the bishop's decision and the implications it held for me and my children. I prayed for understanding, and when that didn't come, I prayed for relief. I felt a pressing weight of confusion, despair, and helplessness

each time I thought about the difference between my conception of what was right and the bishop's and how his decision was now going to affect my life. I felt my anger slice like a hot blade through the very cords that bound me to my ward and to the whole Church. For the first time in my adult life, I could envision the Church going forward without me in it.

I can't remember at what point during that week I finally received an answer, but I remember the answer itself very clearly. Alone in my bedroom as I wept and poured out my story of injustice to the Lord yet one more time, I suddenly felt a piercing affirmation coming out of a place of emotional stillness that was not a part of me, telling me very simply, "You are right." Motionless, I listened for the rest of what I wanted to hear—the part about how the bishop was wrong and the wrath of a righteous God would soon fall on him like a thunderbolt! But that message never came. Instead, the Holy Ghost poured love out on me, and in those wonderful minutes of spiritual clarity the absence of any accusation against my bishop spoke volumes. The bishop, right or wrong, was not my concern. Instead, I saw the task of enlarging my heart and strengthening my soul lying before me, and with the assurance of God's love and the blessings of free agency won for me by Mother Eve, I knew I had all that I needed to move on.

When our ideas or opinions are

Church — Balance of Power or Detente?

overruled by others, the first and most natural reaction is to contend with those others on behalf of our heartfelt beliefs. But contention is extremely dangerous because it hardens our hearts and drives away the Holy Ghost. It is possible for people to hold different views of what is right without succumbing to contention. People can state their views, explain them, even point out possible flaws in another person's thinking, without invoking the spirit of contention.

One way to do this is to clarify in your own mind the purpose of the explanation in the light of unconditional respect for the free agency of the person with whom you are speaking. If the purpose of your explanation is tainted by a desire to overcome the other person with your words—to convince, to control, to win—you move into dangerous territory. If, while you are speaking, you feel your respect for the other's free agency draining out of you, watch for contempt to replace respect and any remnant of charity to disappear. You are now contending, and the purpose of your discussion has changed from explanation to defiance, from enlightenment to domination.

Contention comes not from having different ideas of what is right, but from the effort to prove another person wrong.

For all our talk about tolerance and diversity, contention as a way of sorting out our differences is both honored and glorified in America's culture. The world often asks us to

fit people and their disagreements into the dichotomous arrangement of "right and wrong." While there certainly are important laws and principles that fit that arrangement—and knowing that we must guard against the danger of trying to rationalize away our very real sins—still, the rule of "right and wrong" serves us poorly in most disagreements with others. Even so, it is what we naturally fall back on whenever conflict occurs. As we start to fall, we grab onto contention to prop us up and support our need to be seen as "the right one" in a dispute. Even when we try to acknowledge valid issues on both sides of an argument, the very fact that we have taken sides pushes us into the "us/them" duality and its corollary, which says "they" are wrong and need to be stopped—or changed—by "we" who are right.

Christ asks his disciples to see conflict with different eyes—with our spiritual eyes—and get off the seesaw that says, "If I'm up, you must be down!" He wants us to look at our brothers and sisters as a part of ourselves and realize that contending with them is as foolish as the foot contending with the hand on the same body. I believe Christ would agree with the comic strip philosopher Pogo: "We have met the enemy, and he is us."

The Church asks us to gather ourselves together in communities of many different people. Different is difficult, and this gathering into communities has created challenges for members since Joseph

Smith first restored the Gospel. The challenge is intensified by our belief in individual personal revelation. It is disciplined by asking our obedience to a hierarchical authority. The tension between personal revelation and authority keeps each of us vibrantly humming and engaged in both the workings of the Church and the pursuit of our own salvation. I believe the latter task is the more important one for each of us, from President Hinkley on down, and the Church organization serves us best when we keep that fact in mind. Then we realize that it doesn't really matter whose idea gets acted on in the day-to-day business of running the ward, the stake, or the Church itself.

What is important is how each of us uses the Church community to refine our souls, to come unto Christ, to make our selves perfect and complete. When we come before him, Jesus will not ask us if we won in our disputes with others or even if we were on the right side. Instead, he will ask if we won our struggle with the natural man, the desire to control, the need to be essential, to feel powerful, to be right instead of righteous. If we are called upon to sacrifice on the altar of God our most tender and delicate parts—a piece of our ego—then truly in that act we become one with our Savior.

The philosopher/psychiatrist Sheldon Knopp said that all the significant battles are waged within the self. These are the only battles Christ is truly interested in. ✿

Favorite Exponent

I moved from Arizona to Massachusetts two weeks before this year's Exponent retreat. Although my grandma and a friend were going with me, they are both pretty social, so I knew I was on my own. I love girls camp and being "in nature" — although not "of nature" — so I hoped that the retreat would be like girls camp.

It wasn't. It was even better.

After the first-night introductions, which were sometimes humorous and sometimes sobering, I felt an attachment to these women. Perhaps there's a better word than "attachment," but I haven't come up with it — perhaps because I've never really felt that way before.

By Saturday afternoon, I was rowing a canoe in the middle of a lake, telling another woman deep, personal things about myself. I had no idea what had happened to the introverted-Emily I knew so well. This discussion, and others like it, happened because of the feelings



of acceptance, trust, and friendship at the retreat.

I went up to New Hampshire expecting to be with a lot of deep, earthy, older women, but a wide range of ages, attitudes, and lifestyles were represented. I think we need to encourage this diversity to make sure that all women, no matter where they are on the Church-attending spectrum, know that they are welcome at this retreat and others like it.

Emily Clyde-Curtis

The voices I heard in the New Hampshire woods reflected a diversity of experience, age, education, and hope. If I were to describe in a nutshell the conversations and presentations I heard, it would be that they exuded confident good will and good works. I heard an eagerness from young adults to carry on the Exponent and *Exponent II* legacy. I heard commitment of grandmothers to nurture and shepherd that energy. I heard the triumph of some women over debt or depression or deceit. I heard joy expressed for marriage, for independent happiness, for motherhood, for a successful career, for a successful career rejected, for graduate studies, and for just being together in a beautiful place with the freedom to speak or listen or wander or reject or learn. Such women are not powerless or acquiescent. They provided yet another view of the ethical heart of what we are and what we aspire to be.

Aileen Clyde

Water Reflections

by Cheryl Howard

My favorite retreat moments seem to have a water theme. For several years I left camp, regretting the fact that I hadn't taken time out to go canoeing. Finally, Sue Hawes invited me to paddle along with her early one morning. It was sheer pleasure skimming along in the early morning sun, enjoying Sue's expertise in boating and in her knowledge of the lake.

I also take a perverse delight in the booming of the bullfrogs at night. I have rarely experienced such a cacophony of sound, but it all goes to show that Mother Nature is still in charge. One can't call the cops on these neighbors; we humans are at their mercy.

One of my most poignant memories was the year after Harriet — one of the owners of the camp —

died. We wanted to demonstrate our love for her and all the years she had dedicated to Hillsboro Camp. We gathered one evening on the dock and placed little votive candles on small blocks of wood and gently pushed them out into the current. The hymns we chose drifted along with the twinkling candles. The beauty of those moments was mesmerizing. ❀

Retreat Moments



LAUREL ULRICH

I had a truly mysterious experience at this year's retreat. On the day I was scheduled to give a workshop, I woke up speechless. Literally speechless. Not a sound would come out of my throat. It came on almost without warning, just a little scratchiness the day before.

We are told that adversity brings blessings. In my speechless state, I found an Aaron to speak for me. With my notes and a few instructions whispered in her ear, my friend Sue Gong spoke for me, adding new and important insights of her own and leading a powerful discussion.

By the next morning, I could croak like those bullfrogs in the lake, but I still could not speak. I discovered something wonderful. In every discussion, somebody said what I would have said—only better. The real frustration was the loss of one-on-one conversations with old friends and new.

My bout with laryngitis helped

me treasure the gift of sisterhood and the gift of speech. It also helped me realize how important it is to stay connected by writing.

MARY BRADFORD

By Special Arrangement The sign caught my eye as I carried my sleeping bag into the cabin. "This john has been opened for the use of Mary Bradford only." Two paragraphs of warning followed. This "environmental toilet" would not support waste products of even two people. Dire smells and then closure would result.

Not since I was honored as Exponent Day Speaker back in the Pre-existence had I felt so special. Never a camper, always a lover of indoor plumbing and cozy indoor lighting, I had for years ignored discomfort in favor of companionship with the world's best women.

But the older I grow, the more allergic I become. Sleeping outside triggers migraines, so the compassionate leaders had reserved a room for me in the house generally set aside for babies and their mothers. Despite this consideration, the second night, I was suffering from the Mother of all Migraines.

Word went out, so I was visited by the sisters, singly and in pairs. One brought breakfast. "You must eat. Headache is caused by low blood sugar." Another stopped in to pray with me. Another brought Excedrin. Another meditated over my supine body. After the last woman gave me a Shiatzu

massage, I arose and joined the throng.

This experience taught me that yes, I am special, but only in the company of my sisters. These sisters are part of an ever-widening circle dedicated to healing, faith, and hope. It recognizes and showcases our talents and strengths and supports us in our weaknesses. I salute the Exponent women who have provided me with another home.

JANNA TAYLOR

One of my favorite moments at an Exponent retreat occurred during a workshop entitled "What do you want out of your Relief Society?" Laurel Thatcher Ulrich described a moment when she arrived in the De Jong Concert Hall at BYU to speak about her book, *A Midwife's Tale*, for which she had just won the Pulitzer Prize. When she walked out onto the stage, she saw the General Relief Society Presidency seated in the front row, smiling and clapping enthusiastically. Laurel said that this experience reminded her that the Relief Society was about supporting one another. When I get frustrated sometimes with what is going on in my own Relief Society or when I don't feel accepted, I always remember that vision of Eileen Jack, Aileen Clyde, and Chieko Okazaki smiling and clapping for Laurel. And I remember that my first responsibility is to follow their example—to support my sisters.

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Moments continued from p. 11

KIMBERLY CARLILE

Before attending the Exponent retreat, retreaters receive a list of things to bring: bathing suit, flashlight, sleeping bag, scriptures. I always thought there should also be a list of things to leave at home. It might go something like this:

Things Not to Bring to the Exponent Retreat

- 1) Finickiness as to the conditions in which you can execute bodily functions. If you've gotta have porcelain or cannot purge your system in the presence of spiders and moths, you're better off at the local Motel 6 with a copy of *Women are from Venus and Men are from Mars* and a videotape of *Beaches*.
- 2) Pre-conceived notions for personal grooming. This place just isn't set up for the mascara and hairdryer crowd.
- 3) Your diet. In the presence of homemade lemon curd on toast and from-scratch cinnamon rolls and mashed potatoes, resistance is futile.

And last but not least, of course, you leave at home all domestic and mothering responsibilities. Now, I love these responsibilities, but it is with a jolt that I feel the impact of no mouths to feed, no carpools to run, no toy rooms to pick up. It is in that moment that I realize how much mental and physical bandwidth is now available, if only for the next three days, to reconstitute the girl and her intellect and curiosity that is in there somewhere within me. At the Exponent retreat, the choice is yours each year to be the pitcher or the vessel—to give or to receive—stories, epiphanies, and watersheds of the last year. I've been each in different years and always come home newly-minted with ideas, empathy, and spiritual interest. For all the things I don't take with me to the retreat, I sure return with a lot.

ROBIN BAKER

I grew up in a male world; I had five brothers and no sisters. I was a confirmed tomboy. My best friends were generally boys—even into graduate school.

At my first Exponent Retreat in 1990, I was blown away by what felt like my introduction to the new and fascinating world of women. Encouraged by Carrel Sheldon to trust each other and share the issues we were grappling with the very first evening, all of us were remarkably open. This initial baring of our souls enabled us to cut to the chase in our conversations over the weekend.

At every retreat since then, the Friday night introductions have



led to similar “cut to the chase” conversations about the burning issues in our lives. Some of my most memorable conversations have been about the open adoption of our oldest daughter, coping with infertility woes, understanding husbands, grappling with testimony, listening to the spirit, working with church leaders, sharing spiritual journeys.

As I get older, I have started feeling like I really missed out having no sisters all these years. The formerly alien world of women's wisdom and sharing has now become one of my favorite havens.

RUBY VON DWORNICK

I lost my footing when getting into the paddleboat at Hillsboro and fell into the lake. There was nothing my friend Susan, who was sitting on the dock, could do to help me quickly enough, but she was at hand to help me out after the fall, to share a good laugh with me and to get me a dry pair of sneakers so I could make my way back to the cabin to change.

I guess that experience is somewhat indicative of what this retreat is all about. It is a place for those who have lost their footing, those

who are steady on their feet, those who are sitting on the dock half in and half out of the water, those there to reach out a hand, those to take one—some of us walking, some running, skipping, or crawling, however each of us is presently moving along on our journey. We are all sisters here in support of one another.

ZOE CLARKWEST

One breakfast during the most recent retreat, two women took an interest in a comment I had made and asked profound questions with voices full of respect and love. While I have long had hopes regarding the possibilities for what relationships between women can be, that morning the possibilities opened up with tremendous clarity. As we left breakfast, one of the women walked beside me and asked a question. My heart leapt and my mind found greater understanding of myself and Christ. As I wept on her shoulder, the other woman who had been walking somewhat ahead, turned and asked the same question. These are two women who shall be forever beloved though I may never see them again. More inspired interactions with women will come. When I think on it, I not only feel to dance and sing praises, I do.

PANDORA BREWER

I have one retreat memory—from my first retreat—that is so simple and yet so vivid that I think of it often. I was eight months pregnant and carrying sixty-five extra pounds on a frame that had not changed in weight since eighth grade. There was not one shred of Earth Mother beauty in my percep-

tion of myself. I felt grotesque, and this self pity had spilled over into ambivalence about my marriage, the Church, and most of all this outing with a bunch of kumbaya women that I didn't even know.

Then I had a shower. I couldn't be reached by conversation or workshops or fried chicken and bubble bread, but that roofless shower changed me. It was the first time I had ever been naked outside, the first time I had felt hot water and sunshine over my entire body at the same time. A tiny, snooty voice in my head tried to tell me that the



cleansing, baptism thing was a really tired metaphor, but the scared, isolated woman silenced the static, and in this quiet I allowed myself to be healed in that gray wooden stall with trees overhead and steam at my feet. I felt so natural, so accepting in the glint and openness of the blue sky, that I washed away the self-consciousness that had had me nearly paralyzed. I was able to comb out my wet hair, get dressed and connect with people without the barrier of judgment.

BARBARA TAYLOR

My favorite part of each retreat has been mealtime—not just because the food is fantastic but because

the “soul food” is so incredible. I have never experienced a mealtime that I didn't walk away having feasted spiritually, emotionally, or intellectually.

SARAH FARMER

My favorite moment at the 1999 retreat was the spontaneous discussion table about adoption that was created at the Saturday evening meal. I was just about to adopt my five-year old girl from Bulgaria, and joining me at the table were women who had been adopted, women who had adopted children, and women who were thinking of adopting. Our experiences, hopes, fears, frustrations, and excitement were shared so openly and so freely that a real bond developed between those at the table that night. I left feeling supported in my decision and knew that I had people to turn to in the tough moments and people who could turn to me when it was their turn to adopt. The friendships I created that night, as our souls opened up about a very personal topic, have been a real nourishment over the past year and a half of my new single mom experience.

ANNIE DREDGE

The most poignant moment of this year's retreat for me was the end of the talent show. Joining together in song, I felt the love and spirit of each of my sisters. Music is such a powerful medium. My heart swelled to hear our voices raised together. The sisterhood we share and the love were so apparent at that moment.

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The Rocky Mountain Retreat:

by Jerrie Hurd

We “organizers” of the Denver Area Mormon Women’s Retreat—the DAM Women—meet at Chevy’s Restaurant in the Cherry Creek area of downtown Denver two, three, or maybe five times a year to plan our retreat. I use quotes around the word “organizers” because I have no idea what that means. These meetings never really appear to be organized. We have no officers. No one leads the discussion. Someone is designated to sign checks—our only bulwark against complete anarchy.

The DAM Women are sixty to seventy individuals who come to the mountains of Colorado once a year from places as far flung as North Carolina, New Mexico, California, and St. George, Utah, not to mention the entire Colorado front range. Remarkably loyal to our retreat, a fourth of these women—ages eighteen to eighty—have not missed once in seven years. Individuals among our number have postponed a surgery, rearranged vacations, missed graduations, and left a wedding reception early in order not to miss our weekend. Some drive all night to get there because they can’t miss work and will do the same going back.

Why? What brings them year after year?

That was the topic of discussion the last time the “Chevy’s group” got together. We had been asked to write something about our retreat for *Exponent II*. With that in mind, we were trying to figure out how

to describe ourselves, and, more importantly, how to explain that amazing group loyalty.

“People come because it’s a safe place,” someone offers.

“What does that mean?”

“It means we can talk.”

We list some of our favorite things about the retreat—the book list, for example, seems to happen spontaneously year after year. Participants write down the best books they have read recently on paper



posted in the kitchen of the lodge. Many women quickly discover that they’ve read the same book and gravitate to the same table for dinner and an informal discussion.

We move on to the music. We know how that got started. Our second year, we invited Cathy Stokes to be our keynote speaker. Cathy is known to church members as the Chicago inner-city

Relief Society president who became the Church’s official ambassador to Ghana when that country had been closed to missionary work and needed to be re-opened. She told us all about that, but we remember even more the

huge pot of red beans and rice she cooked and how she taught us to sing—really sing. Even when she’s not with us, we try to sing as though she were standing there, arms wide, embracing whatever music we can give her, and we know she won’t be satisfied with “some little squeaky noise.”

Besides Cathy, we remember all our various keynote speakers with fondness. Barbara Smith surprised us with her candor. We also remember her as the only person who ever wore pantyhose to one of our retreats. Eloise Bell entertained us with her one-woman show based on the pioneer midwife, Patty Sessions. Marj Conder gave us insights on the Relief Society exhibit that she curated for the Museum of Church History and Art. Peggy Fletcher Stack talked about covering President Hinckley’s tour of Africa as the religion editor of *The Salt Lake Tribune*.

Women from our own ranks have provided us with some memorable evenings. Phyllis Barber has read



Every Year a Safe Trip



her short stories to us. Alyson Beytien described the day-to-day challenges of raising three autistic sons. Laurel Madsen showed us slides of the women in Bangladesh with whom she worked. Miriam Bleyl shared her experiences traveling around the world, interviewing individuals considered “wise” in their own cultures as part of her dissertation research.

Unlike some retreats, the DAM Women don’t rough it. We rent a lodge at a YMCA Camp in Winter Park, Colorado, a ski village that not even the Alps can match for its stunning mountain backdrop. Besides having real beds and private baths, we have access to the recreational facilities at the camp—swimming, horseback riding, roller blading, tennis, and hiking.

“You realize, of course, that some women never attend anything. They just ride horses and swim the whole time.”

“Do we care?”

“No.”

What might surprise some critics is the high degree of commitment to the Church in our group. A few of us haven’t been to church in years, but among our attendees are current Relief Society presidents, seminary teachers, Young Women’s and Primary leaders.

Terms like “frank,” “honest,” and “forthright” would probably best describe the discussions at our retreat. The atmosphere is stimulating but not charged. We deal with frustrations, entertain questions, and name hypocrisy for what it is, but almost no one is interested in taking up a cause. At our Sunday morning Quaker meeting, many participants refer to the retreat as “a spiritual highlight.” That again raises the interesting question of why women, most with strong Church commitments, will drive miles and miles into the mountains of Colorado to seek such an experience.

The Chevy’s Group still hasn’t solved that one. Likewise, we’re not really sure how our retreat got started. We do, however, give Linda Tyler credit for nurturing the retreat in its early years. Despite our hazy recollections about its beginning, our history is well documented, thanks to Lori Gimmeson, who has assembled a scrapbook that’s more a work of art than history.

It’s getting late. Chevy’s is getting ready to close. They’ve started putting chairs on top of tables, and



we still haven’t answered that one question that we agree is somehow central to understanding the success of our retreat experience.

“We laugh a lot,” someone offers.

“There are women in our group who can really tell a funny story.”

“And we play card games until the wee hours of the morning.”

“What? You want to make sure we sound at least slightly defiant?”

“Yeah, like playing ‘scumbag’ and ‘hand and foot’ is defiant.”

“What else do we talk about?”

“Sex.”

“Yeah, everybody wants to know what’s normal.”

“Do we know yet?”

“No.”

“We talk a lot about abuse.”

“But it’s oddly positive talk.”

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"What do you mean?"

"Usually abuse is treated like it's a misfortune that happens to some of us, who have to find the strength to get over it. At the retreat, people take the attitude that if you've survived abuse, you can survive anything. They appreciate the strength that's already there."

"Sex and abuse. You realize that's exactly what some people assume 'wild women going off to the woods' would talk about."

"Yeah, but those people would be surprised. Most of the conversation is about family, kids, grandkids, schools, soccer games. We don't see each other that often, so there's lots of catching up."

"With one big difference. When we talk about our families, we include everyone—the sons who didn't go on missions and the daughters who didn't marry in the temple."

"Our gay son."

"The one who joined the Jewish faith."

"You can't do that at Church."

"Why?"

"Because it would be like admitting you're a failure or something."

"But we're not failures. Look at who comes to our retreat."

"Yeah, but we're made to feel like failures if we don't 'succeed' with every child and every marriage."

"Nobody can do that."

"Right, but that's the expectation."

"So you end up being guarded in what you say."

"Yeah, you put on a good front."

"Well, let's face it, nobody puts on a good front while she's wearing her pajamas."

"That's what it comes down to? Jammies? We feel safe to talk about anything and everything because we're wearing our jammies?"

For a moment no one has a response.

"Well, it might also have something to do with eating brownies for breakfast."

"We *don't* eat brownies for breakfast."

"Maybe *you* don't eat brownies for breakfast."

I'm suddenly confused. I remembered our breakfasts as being better than brunch at the Boulderado Hotel. "Who *does* fix the breakfast?" I ask.

"It alternates between the group from New Mexico and the group from St. George. Except that one year it was someone else."

"Who keeps track of that?"

"It just works out."

Actually that might be the most important thing you could say about the DAM retreat—it just works. ✿

Rocky Mountain Fever

by Kathy Koldewyn

It's hard to describe why this connection is so important. It's something akin to spring fever—call it Rocky Mountain Retreat Fever. The Retreat is like I envision a spa weekend to be: a fix-all, a luxury for the mind and senses. It's a healthy place. Here I meet and renew friendships with all kinds of

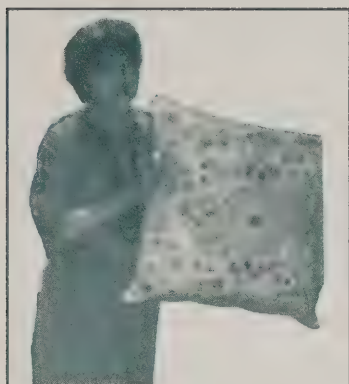
Mormon women. What a delightful smorgasbord! I get to take a little of this and some of that and share what is uniquely me with no shame or judgment.

For me, this is a deeply spiritual weekend. I go home with a renewed commitment to be myself

yet seek a higher (or even funnier) plane, to face adversity and life's problems with spunk, and to give of myself to all of God's children. And when the next spring comes and my commitment has waned, Rocky Mountain Retreat Fever comes calling to give me yet another chance. ✿

The Safe Place

by Laurel Madsen



One year I arrived at the Rocky Mountain Retreat the morning after a 12,000

mile journey from my home in Bangladesh. I was coming to Colorado anyway that summer, but I came a month early just to be at Snow Mountain for two days with a group of Mormon women.

That's how much the retreat means to me. And why? The answer lies in the moment of my arrival. As I stopped the car near the big cabin we would all share, I could see a group of women sitting at a picnic table out front. In another minute, the weariness of jet lag dropped away as I jumped from the car straight into affectionate hugs, enthusiastic greetings, and wide smiles. I was at home, once again, among dear friends.

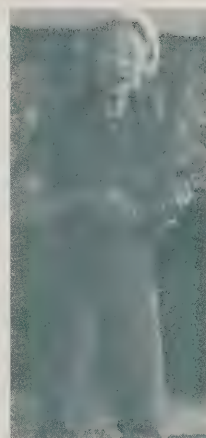
It was Chieko Okazaki who articulated our feelings about the retreat when she said to us, "This is a safe place." We all knew what she meant. We fifty, more or less, women can come to our cabin at Snow Mountain and be completely ourselves. We don't worry about appearance—the uniform is jeans and T-shirts. We sing together joyously, sometimes raucously, some of us off-key, when Cathy Stokes comes from Chicago to lead us in Mormon hymns, Protestant

anthems, Black spirituals, and pop songs. We eat a lot, and we don't worry about the calories. We're loud and noisy as we stay up late playing well-fought table games.

Sometimes we're a bit wicked, like the memorable craft evening that we made Christmas tree ornaments out of tampons. If we want to be lazy and sleep instead of going on the annual Early Bird hike, no one makes remarks. If we confide our troubles, angers, or doubts or if we cry, we don't need to be afraid of judgment and criticism. It's a circle of unconditional love and acceptance. My soul soaks up that atmosphere.



I also literally absorb the spirituality that underpins all we do at the retreat. I feel it permeating my nerves and pores. It's restful, and it fortifies me for life in the world. We watch slide shows of great art depicting the Savior's life. We listen to Barbara Smith tell about being guided by the Spirit in her calling as General Relief Society President. We closely surround Chieko Okazaki as she bears her



fervent, yet matter-of-fact, testimony of the reality of Jesus Christ in her life. We listen in awe as Cathy Stokes, Church ambassador to Ghana, tells of her conversion. We weep as Peggy Stack honors us

with the sacred experience of her little daughter's life and death. At the end of every retreat on Sunday mornings, we have a "Quaker Meeting," where those of us who wish to can speak of anything we want to share, and that, most often, is our deepest spiritual feelings.

My daughter, a young mother, accompanies me each year. We are one of several mother/daughter twosomes, and sometimes the daughter is a teenager. From young women to those of middle age to grandmothers—some of us married, some of us single—we find the safe place that allows us to be our unique selves and unites us in sisterhood. ❀



Rocky Mountain Vignettes

LINDA K. TYLER

When we moved to Denver, the relocation was not easy for either our seventeen-year-old daughter or me. I found friends in the ward but did not immediately discover women who saw the world the same way I did.

In the early spring of 1994, I received a notice of a retreat, to be fashioned after the Exponent retreats in New Hampshire, that was to be held in the mountains west of Denver. I was intrigued. I had read about the Exponent retreats and wished I lived close enough to attend. On the Friday I was to leave for the retreat, I had many misgivings, but my husband said, "You'll be glad once you get there."

I arrived at the main cabin and introduced myself to the women around me and before long found women who were particularly open and welcoming. They listened to me and expressed their own experiences and feelings, and I felt like I had come home.

The retreats always energize my mind and fill my soul. I missed last year's retreat because Steve and I are currently living in Siberia on a CES Mission for the Church. But even on the other side of the world, when the retreat weekend happened my soul and heart were back in the Colorado mountains with the wonderful women of the Rocky Mountain Retreat.



SHARMAN WILSON

For me, the Rocky Mountain Retreat is like an addiction. I found that out when I had to miss one year because of my son's high school graduation. I definitely went through withdrawal. Months before that retreat, I began staying away from gatherings with the DAM Women because I knew they'd be planning the retreat. It was too painful for me to hear about it, knowing I would be missing out on all the fun with those kindred spirits.

Each year at the retreat we eat, we learn, we hike, we eat some more, we gab, we play, we make friends, we sing, we eat some more, we share our spirits, we laugh. Each year I get the fix I need to get me through until the next year.

Another reason I go to the retreat is that it gives me a chance to have a distraction-free weekend with my only daughter, Sarah. She started going with me her senior year of high school and has gone nearly every year since. With her incredibly busy schedule, it has been the only substantial mother-

daughter time we've had together.

This coming year my last child graduates from high school on the same weekend as the retreat. But this time I have decided that I'm heading up to Snow Mountain Ranch right after the graduation ceremony Saturday morning. I just gotta get my fix!

PHYLLIS BARBER

I loved being at the DAM women retreat while in the Denver area. I think the women there have a great deal of liveliness and chutzpah combined. I was in a seven-year-lean stretch when I lived in Denver, and I appreciated their support of my work and my attempt to capture the enigmatic magical realism of being a semi-active Mormon. ❀

Join Us

THE DAM WOMEN

(Denver Area Mormon Women's Retreat)

June 1-3, 2001

Winter Park, Colorado

With Our Invited Speaker

Aileen Clyde

She has been described as the least known but most interesting of the 'threesome'—meaning the Elaine Jack General RS Presidency.

To be added to the mailing list, contact

Kathy Koldewyn

933 Columbia Place

Boulder, CO 80303

Koldewyn@bvscd.k12.co.us



Snapshots cont. from p. 3

Each locale has its own flavor and, with some wiggle room, its own calibration on the "liberal to conservative" meter. New England visitors to Midwest Pilgrims can't quite persuade the corn belt gals that they really have to try skinny dipping in a lake by the light of the moon. My sense of the DAM (Denver Area Mormon) women is that they are very friendly and have a savvy world-wide view of moral contribution. A colorful presentation on the women of Bangladesh by Laurel Madsen lingers with me. Then there's Linda Tyler, who intended to go with her husband to Micronesia with the Peace Corps when a bout of skin cancer set them back. Now, healed and healthy, they are serving as CES missionaries in Siberia!

Having been on the planning end of several retreats, the post-mortems following each retreat can be exhilarating: "Wasn't that fun!" "Weren't you moved when . . .?" "What a breakthrough!" "What an insight!" They can also be crushing: "Sister S. thought we were just a bunch of whiners, and she's never coming again." "So-and-so thought it was too much like a Relief Society Conference, and she's never coming again." So

much goes into planning a retreat weekends — time, talent, prayers, sweat, vision. The leaders genuinely hope things will go well for everyone.

I remember Carrel Sheldon's words year after year at Hillsboro: "If you come with expectations, figure out a way to get them met. If you want to reconnect with a long lost friend, be the one to extend your hand. If you want to have quiet time to reflect, take it. Make it be the kind of weekend you want." I propose we create cross-stitch kits with those words.

I love meeting up with long, lost friends, and I love making new ones. I have made some of my closest friendships and plenty of my professional contacts at retreats with my Mormon sisters. Through retreats I met Victoria from Aroostock County, Maine — the shaman (sha-woman?) of the North Woods who heals with her wisdom as well as with her medical training. I spent lively time with Sylvia from Somerville, MA, whose Irish accent entertains in itself, but get her going on the time her underwire bra set off the alarms at a prison and you'll never stop laughing. Or Sue who was a Relief Society President by day and a bayou crocodile control canoe paddler by night. Who will I meet next time? I can't wait.



Importing talent brings fresh voices, new stories, different points of view. Chieko's constant humor and fearlessness fuel me long past the weekend in Colorado. Louise Plummer's stories about shrimp allergies and chicken sex still make me laugh. Cherry Silver's inside scoop on the new Relief Society manuals opened my eyes. So did Peggy Stack's debriefing on her life as religion editor for the *Salt Lake Tribune*, interviewing General Authorities and seeing the bureaucracy with unique eyes.

My hope for retreats is more or less met every time I attend one. I come for connection with friends old and new; support; faithful and frank discussions; lots of laughter; a few tears; something to chew on mentally, spiritually, and physically; a break from routine. To the extent I bring what I can to the venture and every participant contributes, the words of the song in the Rockford retreat center ring as prayer and prophesy: "In this very room, there's quite enough love for one like me." ❁

Crafts, Rocky Mountain Style

By Lisa Ray Turner

Like most life-long members of the Church, I grew up with visions of plastic grapes in my head. The clusters were a permanent fixture in the homes of all ward members, even those who “didn’t come out.” They glistened in rainbow colors of blue, purple, green, and that ‘70s favorite, burnt orange. Real wood vines and silky green leaves completed the look.

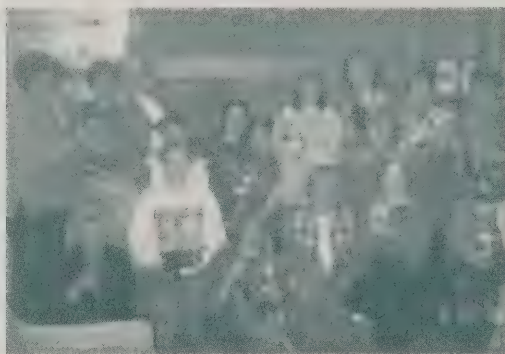
Plastic grapes were a symbol of responsible Mormon womanhood, part of the package of growing up Mormon. The way I understood it, you found a worthy priesthood holder to “take you to the temple,” you had a few babies, you twisted your hair into a beehive, and you made plastic grapes. And lived happily ever after.

Well, I’m still waiting for the beehive hair, but I have my plastic grapes. I made them at the Rocky Mountain Retreat. The grapes were a labor of love—or maybe just labor; I’m still not sure.

To celebrate the retreat’s fifth anniversary, someone came up with the idea of offering a once in a lifetime opportunity—the chance to make plastic grapes. Crafts at a retreat? Well, like the hymn says, the thought made reason stare. Especially for someone like me. I’ve never been good with a paintbrush or scissors, and I can’t tell you what toile painting is. Past attempts at sewing look like they were stitched by Captain Hook: christening gowns that would fit a

three-year-old and blouses with arms suitable for the average orangutan. It’s no wonder I leave crafts for nimble-fingered women who pack glue guns with ease.

So, you can imagine my surprise when we made the definite decision to include crafts—or anti-crafts, as the case may be—at the Rocky Mountain Retreat. I realized that even retreaters have recessive craft genes in their genetic make-up, prone to popping out when least expected. We are Mormon women after all, daughters and granddaughters of women who



labored endlessly to create Christmas wreaths out of computer cards, pumpkin centerpieces from dryer hoses, and, that all time favorite, plastic grape centerpieces.

Paula Goodfellow, my friend of eighteen years and one of the retreat organizers, jumped into the role of adjunct homemaking leader. It was her task to figure out how these icons of the fifties were actually made. In Paula’s characteristic intellectual style, she researched plastic grapes on the Internet, scoured craft stores for supplies, and interviewed people

who were experts in the fine art of plastic grape making. (Interestingly enough, her best sources turned out to be men. Go figure.)

When we actually had the directions in hand, we got nervous. Did you really make plastic grapes by filling small Christmas balls with resin, breaking the balls when the resin dried, and then wiring the balls to a wooden stem? This sounded difficult, painstaking, and tedious. I immediately gained new respect for my Relief Society foremothers. When the actual night of making the grapes came, that respect intensified.

Who knew that plastic grapes in process smell like the toxic waste from a nuclear plant? Who knew that the resin would stick to our fingers like honey on a kitchen floor? And, who knew that plastic grapes could turn out ugly?

I made all those discoveries. The smell gave us headaches—or made us high, I still can’t decide which. The resin globbed onto our hands so strongly that we had to put in a midnight call to the security personnel at Snow Mountain Ranch to bring turpentine to clean it off—an unusual request for a security woman accustomed to dealing with errant bears or bleeding children. And the grapes? I made them. Horrible looking things, if truth be told. In an act of true sisterhood, a kind soul rescued me and shaped my grapes into something recognizable.

You'd think we women of the Rocky Mountain Retreat would have learned our lesson. Alas, no. The grapes were such a hit we decided to include a craft the following year. But what could top plastic grapes?

The answer came when I found the directions for tampon angels (on the Internet, of course—they don't publish things like that in the Relief Society manual). Yes, you read that correctly. Angels made of Playtex tampons.

Stephanie Stevens jumped into the task of figuring out how to make these beauties. And, apparently, her young son got a bit of an education in the process. After Stephanie had fluffed up the Playtex tampons by soaking them in water, she strung fifty of them across her bathtub, the same way most women hang up pantyhose to dry. Her four-year-old son wandered in and asked what they were. Stephanie is a physician, after all, and would never shy

away from biological facts, so she told him they were tampons. All I can say is Stephanie had better be putting money away for therapy when her son discovers how tampons are really used.

The most amazing thing about the tampon angels is that they turned out to be adorable. Pretty, actually. Some were downright elegant. Not mine, by the way. Too much gold paint had sopped my angel's dress, and her hair looked like a bad perm job. She ended up where most of my craft projects do—in the trash.

Still, it was fun to attempt these projects in a supportive community. We go to retreats to be enriched, bolstered, and to share the unique camaraderie of Mormon women. Well, I'm here to say



that that can happen around a table of tampon angels or while sniffing the dangerous fumes of plastic grapes. The talk is free-flowing, the laughter contagious, and some of us have even ended up with lovely decorations for our home!

As for future craft plans for the Rocky Mountain Retreat, I don't know. If we found just the right one, maybe. But how do you top a tampon angel? ❀

SHARON SHEA

I became an advocate of retreats for women halfway through the first afternoon of the first one I ever attended almost a decade ago. Shy around strangers, I did not expect to enjoy the company of all the unfamiliar women, but I found I was comfortable among them. Now they are my friends.

Why do I go to retreats? While the retreat programs have been universally excellent, they are of secondary importance to me. I go to have fun. On family vacations, I do the same work as at home but with

someone else's equipment. At a retreat, in the rare instance a phone rings, it is *never* for me!

There are also long-term benefits. I feel myself becoming aware of being a member of a community of women. I look forward to examining opinions other than my own, and I know that my opinions are welcomed and valued. I am grateful to have a growing circle of good friends who support me.

Another long-term benefit of retreating is the impact it has on my family. I come home from a retreat happier than when I left, and they

appreciate me for almost a whole week after I get home. They come to realize that all the household things done automatically by invisible hands are not the work of fairies but of *the mom*. By going away, my two daughters learn that women friends are extremely important, that it's okay and necessary to take time for yourself, and that everyone has needs that extend beyond the family.

Maybe that is the real reason I go to retreats, after all—to remind myself that no matter how many hats I wear, the person I am is still here, waiting to surface. ❀

Provo Canyon: Relief Society in the Woods

by
Lynn Larson



The Provo Canyon Women's Retreat began fifteen years ago after Shirley Paxman invited local readers of *Exponent II* to her home for an evening. Everyone enjoyed the time together so much that the retreat emerged out of that night. The first few retreats were held at the Girl Scout Trefoil camp. After that, Aspen Grove, a BYU property, was the site.

The mission statement for those retreats was "The purpose of the Provo Canyon Women's Retreat of Utah Valley is to provide an opportunity for women of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to search for greater understanding and appreciation of their unique roles and purposes. They do this within the context of the gospel and in the spirit of sisterhood, which seeks to support and promote the value of each individual, and in the spirit of *Exponent II*, which recognizes the power and importance of women and their contributions."

Our unstated purpose is to have fun, to get away from it all (whatever "it" may be), eat good food, and not wash dishes for one week-end a year so we might return spiritually strengthened. Guest speakers have included General Relief Society Board members; we've also had a wonderful variety of workshops. At times, the retreat has been referred to as "Relief Society in the Woods."

As the years went by, some discussion emerged about the direction of the retreat. As Dianne Carr said, "We wanted the retreat to continue, but the track it was taking was different than it had been when we first began." Aspen Grove also began a policy of reserving the right to sit in on sessions to assess if they adhered to their mission statement, which was unappealing to most of the retreat goers.

Now the road to the "new" retreat began. A new site was needed—a new mission statement—a new name (although there isn't one yet). We had a wonderful group meeting about our retreat goals led by a professional mediator. The goal was to make it possible for all perspectives to be considered. Ginger Woolley summed up that meeting: "Last year's retreat was full of echoings of common desires—women's friendships and stories, a time of reflection away from the daily manic modern living, some R&R in a natural setting, food that we don't have to prepare.

Beyond those few common desires, who is to say just what it is we want, collectively or individually?"

We enjoy assortment packages and don't see our primary aim as being to make the caramel lovers into cherry chocolate lovers. If you had to put down your life's mission in a hundred words or less, would it be the same one you would have written ten years ago? Doubtful. With this in mind, it is the opinion of this year's retreat committee that we avoid mission statements and group names that act as banners of identity that may not be as inclusive or as fluid as the women in our group.

After many hours of searching, we found the Reid Ranch, a beautiful mountain resort playland.

Janelle Lysenko has this to say about this time of transition: "A facilitator guided us through the process of searching our hearts and articulating the vision we have for our group. I returned this year with enthusiasm, and I was more than pleased to find that we were capable in every way of creating the kind of retreat that we had





envisioned last year. A guest I brought this year said, 'I have never felt so free and so accepted by a group of people.'"

Cynthia Arnold read about the retreat the first year it was advertised in *Exponent II*. She was just starting to identify herself as a Mormon feminist and wanted to find others who felt the same way. "The first eight years I went to the retreat, I felt fulfilled listening to speakers and participating in workshops. The next few years, I felt I needed to be a source of support to others. The last few years, I have come mainly to connect with women I see only this one time a year."

This year Cynthia facilitated a workshop titled, "Developing Personal Spirituality: Using Non-traditional Tools to Gain Insight and Faith." Over the years, she has seen women come and go. "I think some women felt the retreat had gone too far, and others feel as if it is not going far enough. However, this year I felt an atmosphere of acceptance of everyone for wherever she is."

A woman who has attended the retreat for ten years, Lisa Lambert, felt that this wasn't a "new" retreat at all: "The retreat is a place where one can see and feel deeply the

truth that people of good will can disagree about fundamental values and still love and respect one another and enjoy each other's company in spiritual, intellectual, and recreational pursuits."

RevaBeth Russell also read about the first retreat in *Exponent II*: "I was excited to be involved with a group of like-minded women. I assumed that these would be women who also read *Exponent II*." RevaBeth, who has attended all



but one retreat, goes on to say: "At every retreat I found strength in other women's struggles. Their testimonies built mine. Many times I found myself thinking that if they could do it, I could." When the "new" retreat came around this year, she felt there were no guarantees of how it would turn out. "But," RevaBeth summed up, "maybe this new way is just how it is supposed to be!"

Some differences were felt in this

year's retreat. The retreat chairwoman, Ariane Newell, says, "I go to the retreat because it fills me spiritually. I would not be going if it were just fun and games. This retreat was deeply spiritual and touched me in many places. I think the goal of the retreat is to facilitate and support women along their spiritual journeys---but we do not seek to define their path or their destination."

For me, the atmosphere, the beauty of the setting, and swimming three times a day were worth it.

This summer, Mary Kay Grow, a key member of the committee, was killed in an automobile accident. Her absence was felt by many. As one woman put it, "Mary Kay's passing has left a void. I hope that when I go, I leave a similar void in people's lives."

All of us have woven our lives into the fabrics of others, just as they weave into ours. The relationships we make at retreats are important and lasting. It is a lovely thing to think that when we are not here, we leave a void. ❀

Come to

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Provo Canyon Rememberings

LAURIE WILLIAMS SOWBY

I attended every Provo Canyon retreat for fifteen years. Singing together, sharing updates on our lives, and laughing until tears ran down our faces were experiences I always looked forward to. The need for sleep was upstaged by late-night conversations, jokes, snacks, and shoulder rubs. The compiled bios list, in alphabetical order according to first name, was always a highlight and enhanced by live delivery during our Friday evening gathering.

I have vivid mental pictures and warm feelings associated with the Sunday morning meetings at Trefoil, when the sun shone on the faces of my sisters gathered in the amphitheater, encircled by golden aspens. I only wished such an experience were available in my own ward and that every woman in the church could feel such love and acceptance. Later, at Aspen Grove, we were more than once treated to the season's first soft snow falling outside the lodge's panoramic windows as we shared our testimonies and experiences. The final event was gathering in a huge circle for the "Lord of the

Dance," which was always followed by warm hugs and farewells. I returned home physically exhausted but spiritually rejuvenated, ready to face the real world in my ward and family again.

MARGIE HOLMES

One of my most precious retreat experiences was sitting on a balcony, basking in a beautiful fall day and listening to Margaret Toscano teach about Christ and the symbolism that points to him. I had lost my eighteen-year-old son to a combination of alcohol and sleeping pills and was desperately trying to find some peace and solace. The moment I remember most clearly was weeping as Margaret read to us from Isaiah 53: "But he was wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed." That moment was one of several key experiences that helped the personal nature of the atonement sink deeply into my heart.

I have treasured the retreat because of the combination of spir-

itual insight articulately expressed and loving acceptance of each woman regardless of where she is in her life's journey.

This year I sensed a less spiritual focus than in the past. I hope that our efforts to include everyone does not mean that we have to silence spiritual content but rather that we can embrace a wider range of expression.

LISA ARRINGTON

For me, one of the highlights of the retreat has been the singing. We all felt that singing really united the group. And since many of us had few experiences in our lives singing with others, this was a good chance to do it. We took several breaks and sang a lot. At the end of our retreat, after our sharing meeting, we were so full emotionally that it seemed only appropriate to close with the singing of the "Lord of the Dance." Everyone would join hands and circle around while singing the chorus. It was something that seemed to carry us through to the next year. ✱



Bread

Bread can mean trouble;
 bread can set you up.
 Put too much trust in its power
 and you're lost in the woods listening
 to wolves telegraph
 their good fortune.
 Those crumbs dropped in faith
 shine like beacons for the birds.
 You would have done better with stones,
 magic ones that light up in moonshine.

Then a cottage
 rising like a crusty loaf among the trees.
 You are welcomed at the table
 but weeks of rolls and pancakes,
 bagels, scones and muffins,
 make you doughy and soft.
 You see what must be sacrificed
 to the fire.
 You push the search
 for treasure that will take
 you home to father.

Ann Gardner Stone

Pilgrims Dissect the Miracle

Lay it out, pull back the skin, locate the beating heart:
 Mariachi Mass, Vaclav Havel,
 lemon-pea jello, okra and apple scrapple,
 eyes of a woman, laughter
 Miracles telling truth about our lives.

Atonement heals, uncomplicates
 the transformed soul
 simply.
 Hands, hearts, souls
 reaching, touching, weaving.
 Producing the miracle of Pilgrimage.
 "I've found my people!"

Pilgrimage Group Poem

Miracles

How is it miracles work?
 Are they the giddy industry
 of the membrane angel world around us?
 Parking spaces.
 Lost keys.
 Quarters underfoot.
 Kind words and casseroles impeccably timed.
 What about those snooker stunts?
 Moses before Pharaoh
 abracadabras with wands and water.
 Royal wizards duplicate them all.
 All but that last one, the one with
 the dead sons.
 This is a miracle?
 This savage show stopper?
 Oh, please. Spare me.
 In this rent system
 where horror is expedient
 I cannot tell the difference.
 The casserole comes
 but the limb is still lost.
 The missing key appears
 but the spouse leaves.
 I have lost my bearing.
 I do not understand
 the musculature of the miraculous.
 Perhaps I should embrace them all
 and bow my head before
 the dead Son
 who spares me.

Linda Hoffman Kimball

The theme for the 1997 Midwest Pilgrims retreat was "Bread and Miracles." Linda Kimball and Ann Stone were asked to write poems on the topic to read on the opening evening's program. Later in the retreat, the group divided into teams and each collaborated on writing a poem on this theme.

A Brief History of Midwest Pilgrims

by Ann Stone

Midwest Pilgrims came about as the result of a charge given to the eighty participants at the Nauvoo women's retreat held in 1982. It was to go back to their various geographical locations and organize similar gatherings. The retreat is also the product of the cultural and political climate of the time, both in and out of the church. The women's movement, the advent of *Exponent II*, and the publication of books like *Mormon Sisters* and *Sister Saints* all provided rich soil to nourish the growing awareness of our rich heritage as Mormon women—women who were accomplished, spiritually gifted, and recognized as equals in the early annals of the church.

This time period also provoked questions about women's equality in the modern church—questions that reached a fevered pitch in our Midwest area because of the Equal Rights Amendment and the Church's involvement with its defeat. There were wounds, some deep, and feelings of dis-ease for many women in the church community. Midwest Pilgrims seemed to arrive at just the right time to throw a lifeline to many women.

The first Midwest Pilgrims retreat—held in St. Charles, Illinois, in 1983—was a miracle. The most repeated sentiment about that gathering was that it was the beginning of the discovery of a real sisterhood, something many felt had been lacking in home wards. Walking along a quiet path, K Carpenter had just said that if the



celestial kingdom is like this weekend, she wanted to go there when suddenly, from out of the shadows, jumped two figures yelling “Boo!” This incident captures the essence of our retreats—celestial moments punctuated by a good goose.

Midwest Pilgrims is perhaps different from some of the other women's retreats in that we move from place to place. We meet every other year at a beautiful Catholic retreat center in Rockford, Illinois; other years might find us in Ohio, Minnesota, Michigan, Indiana, or Wisconsin. This mobile retreat gives everyone opportunities to plan a retreat, makes traveling a bit more equitable, and brings in new blood from the host area.

Some years we invite a speaker; other times we have small discussion groups and presentations led from among our own ranks. At our Friday night introductions, we've seen many clever and revealing methods to break the ice: group song writing, sharing loaves of bread that symbolize something in our lives, questions we'd like answered, bumper stickers that

summarize us, and so forth.

If there is any “given” it is the music—usually led by the inimitable Cathy Stokes, who tries to be patient with our mostly white-folks way of singing. Some pilgrims come every year just to sing with Cathy. We've also started a choir for anyone who wants to join, which practices on Saturday and performs on Sunday.

The other piece of the agenda that is sacrosanct is the Quaker Meeting, held outside on Sunday morning. The Quaker Meeting is a time for summarizing, for healing, for sharing thoughts and hearts.

Sometimes, when men of the priesthood are in close proximity, we've shared the sacrament. Sometimes we have skits, musical performances, writers workshops. Sometimes women come who don't like the retreat and leave. Sometimes women only come once. Sometimes we have women who move away from the Midwest and always come back.

The following are some retreat highlights from the past seventeen years of Pilgrimages.

1983 St. Charles, Illinois The question that got it all started: “Why am I really a Mormon?” Jolene Rockwood's discourse on Eve and Susie Hanna's on birth order

1984 Columbus, Indiana A great open air meeting room, husbands

doing KP, Jan Shipp— the non-Mormon Mormon historian, sunrise service on the lake shore

1986 Kalamazoo, Michigan Judy Dushku and her global view; harrowing stories of female mutilation

1987 Lake Geneva, Wisconsin Carol Lynn Pearson; the year of the survivors; introductions that were one horrible story after another about what we'd survived, lightened by Jennifer Goodfellow's "I survived puberty"

1991 Ackers Point, Michigan Paul and Margaret Toscano; hearing men's as well as women's pain; making a quilt

1991 Kirtland, Ohio Paul and Lavina Anderson; those strong Reorganite women; the glorious meeting in the Kirtland Temple

1992 Nauvoo, IL Maureen Ursenbach Beecher talking Relief Society in the room above the store where it all started; singing "Shall We Gather By the River" sitting on the banks of the Mississippi; Susan Rugh sharing historical insights

1993 Madison, Indiana Betty Eadie tells her amazing story (her experience with life after life);

massages and chakras; Joleen Rockwood's scriptural insights

1993 Rochester, Minnesota Emma Lou Thayne— healing and recovery, elevating poetry; therapeutic quilts

1994 Rockford, Illinois "What Difference Do I Make?"; Sue Booth-Forbes and twenty years of *Exponent II*; cartwheels on the grass; random acts of kindness

1995 Minnesota Cecelia Konchar Farr on feminism and literature; body image; the rope course that stretched our comfort zones; Colleen Callahan-Russell's amazing "women-of-size" dance group performing "Woman, the Pioneer"

1997 Michigan Bread and Miracles; the symbolic loaves of bread; a look at a Jewish woman's religious searching; "The Okra Binge-free Show" by Kathy Diehl and other thespians

1999 Kirtland, Ohio Amish wedding dinner served in the Mesopotamia Town Hall by beautiful, pink-cheeked Amish girls; a return to the Kirtland Temple for heavenly music, poignant stories of personal journeys, meditation in a sacred place

2000 Rockford, IL A Louise Degen film festival featuring her award-winning documentary, "Let the Women Vote!" and the groundbreaking and still relevant "Mormon Women and Depression"; memorable bumper stickers: "If Paul Newman really knew me, he'd name a barbecue sauce after me"; "Honk if your garments are riding up"



Have we made a difference? Are retreats little more than weekend getaways? As I read over post-retreat remembrances, I hear the hopeful voices of women who are trying very hard to find ways to live lives that are thoughtful and meaningful and grace-full. Midwest Pilgrims has provided sanctuary for women at various crisis points in their lives, has stimulated our thinking, and has given us some really good laughs. That's certainly worth something.

Claudia Bushman wrote that the purpose of *Exponent II* was to be faithful but frank. I believe the same has been true of our Pilgrim-ages. In the first issue of *MS* magazine, Gloria Steinem said in an article on sisterhood, "I have met brave women who are exploring the outer edge of human possibility, with no history to guide them, and with a courage to make themselves vulnerable that I find moving beyond words." I think Midwest Pilgrims are those women, and we now have seventeen years of meaningful history. I too find that moving beyond words. ✿

Calling all Midwesterners
Save the weekend of May 4, 2001
for the 18th Annual
Midwest Pilgrims Retreat
More information to come



Of Babies, Butterflies, and Batteries

by Barbara Hart Dixon

Linda Hoffman Kimball

I think most Relief Society groups have implicit rules about what can and cannot be discussed. It's usually pretty easy to tell when you've overstepped your bounds.

Let me give you an example. I am in a singles branch of mostly college students because my husband is the branch president. Recently in Relief Society, one particularly thoughtful woman asked why women don't have the same opportunities to use the priesthood that men do. After her question, the interchange went like this:

"But we have something more wonderful than the priesthood."

"What?"

"We can have babies."

"Well, I don't see what's so wonderful about that!"

That comment was followed by shocked silence and then a barrage of statements from class members about the importance of the role of mother in the home and how (I'm not making this up) men should put us on a pedestal, where we belong. The underlying message to this young woman and others like her was that if they pose questions or make questionable statements, they are likely to be subtly reprimanded by the teacher, the other class members, or both.

It's hard to continue making comments (although I keep trying) in

groups that immediately return to answers in tidy packages. That's what I like about retreats: They are untidy. People can and do say absolutely outrageous things, which seldom happens during Relief Society. For example, we once had a Relief Society sleepover in another ward I lived in. The bishop later pronounced "Never again" after he heard that the women had discussed sex. What would have been his reaction to the retreat session I once attended where we discussed ways that single sisters could relieve sexual tension. One sister suggested reading the scriptures; another suggested using something with batteries. It was refreshing to be in a place where people could say what they wanted and no one was likely to quote a conference talk in response.

I love to sing at retreats. I love the way we feminize the hymns: "I will share my love from thee with every sister that I see." We sing for the butterflies that light on our drinks and for the squirrels that envy our endless supply of M&Ms. We sing for each other, as sisters.

But even more important than the funky singing and the openness that have always been hallmarks of the Midwest Pilgrimages are the profoundly spiritual moments—the times when we have shared sorrows about our children, our husbands, ourselves, and the hope we have in the redeeming love of

continued on p. 29



I like Mormon women. I especially like the Mormon women I have met at the Midwest Pilgrimages I have attended over the last fifteen years. They have been sassy, sympathetic, syrupy sweet, silly, and sad. Some have been on a three-day high understandable only to those who have gotten a reprieve from a two-year-old. Some have gotten up at the crack of dawn. Others have slept until noon and missed every scheduled event. All of them have helped me cultivate sisterhood.

What makes this experience different from what I get from my own ward? I reflected on this at a stake Relief Society meeting where we shared ideas about teaching. One of the topics of most interest was "keeping control" of the class. What does a teacher do when someone says something "unacceptable"? What *is* unacceptable? Expressing doubt? Asking questions about our role in the world?

Nauvoo: A Time of Healing

by Charlottle Cannon Johnston

Excerpts from a talk given May 31, 1992, at the Midwest Pilgrims Retreat, Nauvoo, Illinois

While I was president of the stake Relief Society in the Chicago area, the ERA was a flaming issue. I'm sure many of you remember that Illinois was a key state in the ratification of that amendment to the Constitution. The Church saw defeat of the ERA as a moral issue and put much pressure on us to participate in protests against its passage in Springfield. Our stake chose not to direct the women to join the protest, and we gave women information on both sides of the issue.

This period was a stressful time among the women of the Church as well as the women of the nation. Battle lines were drawn over the merits of the ERA and what effect passage would have on women and families. In Hyde Park, we had splits between women who worked outside the home and those who stayed home; between those with college degrees and those without. Women felt

devalued for the choices they were making, whatever they chose to do.

A very unfortunate incident associated with this time was Sonja Johnson's excommunication. It was a tragedy for Sonja personally and for her family, as well as for the Church. I remember feeling that I wished she could work out her issues within the Church rather than before the world.

Sonja's excommunication made many Mormon women feel vulnerable. There was a ground swell reaction from across the country. In 1982, partly in response to the Sonja Johnson incident and because of questions raised by the Church's handling of the ERA, Mormon women gathered in Nauvoo to air their feelings. They were concerned about women's issues in general and women and the Church in particular. Lavina Fielding Anderson spearheaded the event from Salt Lake; *Exponent II* women came from Boston; individual women came from points all over the United States.

It's clear to me that those sixty women represented many women who weren't there. We were stand-ins for many others. There was an electricity in the air. In the very room in Joseph Smith's store where the Relief Society was founded, Maureen Beecher gave a presentation about the founding of Relief Society, which included Joseph Smith's original statement of giving the keys to the sisters rather than *in behalf of* them as later stated. Doctrinal issues, such as women's relationship to the priesthood, were discussed with intensity. Even more important, Nauvoo began a time of healing and furnished a place to talk and experience appreciation for the sisterhood women were feeling.

Out of that gathering grew our Midwest Pilgrim group. We were very concerned about the direction the group would take. Many possibilities had suggested themselves at Nauvoo. We wanted our discussions to be stimulating and honest and in the context of allegiance to the Church. I feel we have been able to achieve those goals. ❁

Butterflies cont. from p. 28

our Savior who can heal those wounds; the meeting in the Kirtland temple, where tears flowed as we listened to exquisite violin music and inspiring words about President Hinckley; and the

simple testimonies that are shared in the quiet of a grove of trees.

As I said—I like Mormon women. I can't get enough of them. For that and many other reasons, I will continue to be active in the Church and in Relief Society. But I will

also continue to go to Midwest retreats; I will continue to make untidy comments in Relief Society; and, most important of all, I will continue my own quest to find my place as a stranger in this strange, strange land of Mormondom. ❁

e-mail reminiscences

by K Carpenter and Pauline Fontaine

KC: Do you remember our first retreat? I think we went out of adventuresome spirit and curiosity. Impressions from those early years: beginning to embrace sisterhood in a diverse atmosphere defined by genuine trust.

PF: What I remember so clearly is feeling so—I hate to admit it—inferior. When we went around the room introducing ourselves, it seemed as if everyone was either a college graduate, graduate student, or a lawyer, doctor, or professor. Then there was you and me—two college drop-outs! In later years, the “getting to know you” part has focused on much more fun—even silly—ideas. We’re taking ourselves much less seriously.

KC: I do remember that I was not identified as Craig’s wife or someone’s mom, so without a title or degree, did I know who I was? Yes, the intimidation factor was there, but it was certainly self-



imposed. Didn’t we do a presentation a few years later? In it we proposed that instead of thinking of ourselves as either apples or oranges (in lifestyles or gospel approaches) we think of ourselves as fruit salad—with lots of nuts thrown in. I still like that analogy.

KC: Do you recall singing “The Spirit of God” in the Kirtland temple and “Shall We Gather By the River” on the banks of the Mississippi in Nauvoo? Singing with Midwest pilgrims was always a highlight, a bonding of sisters present, past, and somehow

world-wide, don’t you think?

PF: I can’t possibly have as good a voice as I feel like I do when combining it with the Midwest Pilgrims. When together, we are truly a choir of angels.

PF: After going to retreats for—what is it, twenty plus years?—I’m not so much interested in the program, whatever it is, as in connecting with old friends. And just getting away. RESPITE!

Would we be different today without our retreat experiences? Without a question! It’s difficult to predict how much of an effect certain experiences have on our lives, but I dare say we are more open-minded and accepting and have learned new insights to the gospel, Church teachings, and Church history.

KC: We have harvested much we did not sow. When is the next Midwest Pilgrims Retreat? Let’s go! ❀

CHRISTINE CRAIG SEPPI

I have been going to the Midwest Pilgrimage since the beginning—not the “Ur” retreat in Nauvoo, but the first Midwest Pilgrimage in the Chicago area in 1983. The first few years that I went to Pilgrimage, I was always exhausted from being pregnant or having a nursing baby. Because I was so tired, I was quieter than usual, and I realized other women were making comments that I would also have

made. It was wonderful to be in a group of LDS women and hear them saying things I thought only I was thinking. And, of course, I loved getting new ideas as well as hearing others agree with me.

Over the past seventeen years of attending retreats, I have continued to enjoy the dialogue of ideas. However, what has become an even more important reason for going is friendship. I no longer live in the Midwest, and I love seeing

friends I know from there. I also drive to the retreat with a group of friends from Pittsburgh. The long car ride there is great for expanding our friendships. So going to Pilgrimage has enhanced friendships here where I live as well as continued friendships with people I would not see otherwise.

Good friends and thought provoking discussions; I cannot think of a combination I enjoy more. No wonder I love to go. ❀

Another Kirtland Miracle

by Rebecca Chandler

"I just had the experience of a lifetime!" exclaimed my friend. She was touring with the Tabernacle Choir, and I had arranged to meet her in between performances. "We just sang 'The Spirit of God Like a Fire is Burning' inside the Kirtland Temple!"

"Ahhh," I smiled. "I know about that experience. Last fall a group of us met in the temple . . ." I started to tell her about our Pilgrimage.

"You were a part of that group they were talking about?" she interrupted.

"Who are 'they'?" I asked

"Our RLDS hosts. They told us that for years and years it had been their policy that non-RLDS groups were welcome to tour the building, but that was all. And then early last fall they had made an exception and let a Mormon group use the temple for a meeting of some kind, and they said that everyone there had felt the spirit of the music. They asked us if we would like to sing."

The hymn their RLDS hosts had most wanted to hear was one not

commonly sung by their own congregations, but they understood it had been sung at the dedication of the temple. Did the choir director have any idea what hymn that might be? Would the choir members be able to sing it? Apparently they did have a pretty good idea what selection was meant and were more than willing to sing it!

So, 325 members of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir have shared with us Midwest Pilgrims that most memorable of musical experiences. ❀

GANIE DEHART

In the summer of 1983, I drove from St. Paul, Minnesota, to my first Pilgrimage retreat somewhere in the wilds of western Illinois. I was in graduate school, struggling to fit the various parts of my life together, and constantly comparing myself to the women I knew both at church and in school. I was afraid Pilgrimage might be one more place where I would feel not quite up to snuff—not as smart, as spiritual, or as accomplished as the women I imagined would be there.

We were asked to introduce ourselves by talking about what we were retreating from and what we were making a pilgrimage to. What I most hoped to find was women who might understand all the different pieces of my life and help me put them together in a way that made sense.

By the end of the weekend, I discovered that these women were smart, spiritual, and accomplished, but they were also struggling and hungering just as I was. All of us were different, yet what we had left behind and what we were seeking overlapped in wondrous ways that allowed us to offer each other spiritual sustenance.

Since then, I've survived graduate school, a divorce, the tenure process, and several moves that have taken me out of the Midwest but not away from the Midwest Pilgrimage. Each Pilgrimage I've attended has been different. We've laughed at silly skits, cried together over shared sorrows, expressed church-related frustrations, marveled at the skills of the poets and quilters among us, sung "The Spirit of God" in the Kirtland Temple, and borne testimony over

and over to each other of the grace of God in our lives.

The reason I keep returning to Pilgrimage is very simple: I am blessed and sustained by the sisters I meet there. I love the spirit I feel in our meetings. I love the stories we share. I love the chance to know each other as ourselves, not as our family roles or church callings. I love the continuing journey we've made together. ❀



Moments cont. from p. 13

SUSAN MAY

This was my first Exponent retreat. I came with my mom and had a wonderful experience. I loved the opportunity to meet such diverse women and hear new and different points of view. I don't agree with all of them, but I realized that we are each a strand of a beautifully woven tapestry. Without even one of those strands, the tapestry would lose its beauty and substance. The spirit of sisterhood abounds at the retreat, and a love for our Savior was abundant. I will treasure the memory.

LOREEN MURPHY

I love it that we all sing with abandon at the retreat. There is much actual talent—thank goodness—and as much joyful noisemaking. And it is truly heavenly.

My favorite moment this year was when I pleaded with my sisters for the words to a forgotten camp favorite that I needed for girls camp the next week—and they delivered. I had searched the Internet, scoured music stores, and had not found it. I asked my Exponent sisters, and they not only knew the words, but two young women, Annie Dredge and Sara Harvill, sang it to us on the spot in a beautiful two-part duet. I cried because they were so beautiful and I was so full of joy. ❀



Announcing the 10th Helen Candland Stark Essay Contest

We encourage all you long-time contributors to *Exponent II* and those of you who have been thinking of submitting an essay to put on your creative thinking caps and enter this—our tenth!—year's Personal Essay Contest. The winning essay will be awarded \$300 and will be published in the newspaper, along with any honorable mention essays. All other submissions will be passed on to our Readers Committee for consideration. The deadline for submissions is February 1, 2001.

We prefer that entries be mailed on disk or submitted by e-mail (ExponentII@aol.com). If you are submitting hard copy, please include two copies and mail them to Essay Contest, *Exponent II*, P.O. Box 128, Arlington, MA 02476. Good luck!

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